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A PAPER

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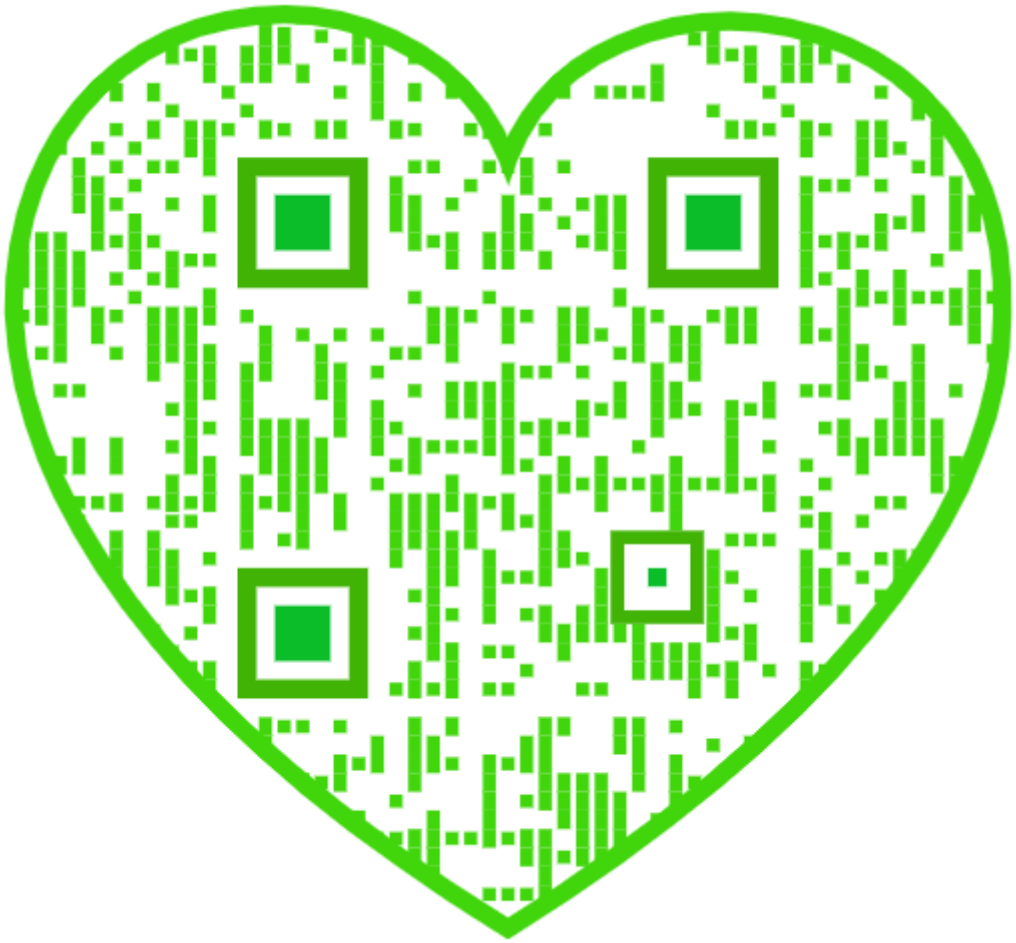
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE

New York State Agricultural Society,

February 11, 1869,

By JURIAN WINNE,

Of Bethlehem, Albany County, New York.



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PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

ALBANY:
PRINTING HOUSE OF CHAS. VAN BENTHUYSEN & SONS.
1869.

THE FATTENING OF SHEEP IN WINTER.

The subject before us is "The Managing and Feeding of Fat Sheep in Winter," together with the difference in the various breeds. My first rule is, always to buy good stock, whatever the breed may be, and to be sure to select animals kindly disposed to fatten. The price of well bred sheep may appear to be high, but depend upon it, if there is no money in feeding good stock, there is no money in poor. It will not do (as has often been said), to buy any kind of sheep for feeding, that you can double your money upon; for a one-dollar sheep will consume about as much feed as a six-dollar one, and as neither of them can be fed through the feeding season for much short of five dollars a head, you will readily perceive that the one-dollar sheep would stand you in six dollars, the other eleven dollars.

According to my experience, the one-dollar sheep would weigh in the spring about eighty

pounds, and sell for seven cents per pound, which would make five dollars and sixty cents—a loss of forty cents, when the six-dollar one would weigh at least one hundred and twenty-five pounds, and sell for ten cents per pound, making twelve dollars and fifty cents—a profit of one dollar and fifty cents, besides getting the credit in the one case of bringing good stock to market, and in the other such as will be hooted at, and reported for you as *scalawags*. Now, as every good citizen values his reputation (and what is a man good for without it), I think this last item should not be lost sight of.

Next in order then, will be the conveniences for fattening. It is bad policy in this country to undertake to fatten sheep in winter, with no protection or shelter, save a few trees or the side of some old building. I recollect an instance of that kind of feeding, which I went to see some ten years ago, where a man had about three hundred sheep feeding, running in a four or five acre lot, without any protection, save such as I have just described. It rained a little while I was there, the ground was soft, although it was February, and his sheep (though otherwise nice good ones), looked wet, lank and

muddy; his feeding troughs were in this lot, all covered with mud, and some of the feed, on account of the mud in the trough, was left. I expostulated with him about his slovenly manner of feeding. He replied that he could do no better. I said to myself, this is your first and last winter for feeding, and so it was.

My buildings, which it will be well to describe as fully as possible, were put up with as much reference to storing the products of the farm as for protecting and sheltering the sheep. The barn first in order, is nearly surrounded by other buildings; it is forty-four by fifty-two feet, with twenty-foot posts, with upper and lower floors—horse and cow stables and granary, all below. Into this barn goes all the grain I raise, first, and then as much feeding hay as it will hold—and there was room this year for but very little.

When I thresh my grain (which I always do in the fall), I put the straw mostly back into this larger barn for feed and litter. The granary in this barn will hold about six hundred bushels of grain, and has an alley through the middle where the corn, oil-meal, etc., is mixed for feeding the sheep. The upper and lower floors of the barn are used for hay, straw, etc., from one feeding to

another. I have a wagon or carriage house close to this barn, twenty by thirty feet, with cellar the whole size, eight feet in the clear, middle and upper floors. This cellar is used exclusively for roots. The roots are generally cut by machine, and every day at half-past twelve, are fed to the sheep. When I have plenty of them, we feed daily at the rate of from three to four bushels to the hundred. The middle floor of this building is used for carriages, sleighs, harness, etc., and the upper floor for grain for the sheep, and holds from fifteen to sixteen hundred bushels (not without studding the beams however). After the feeding and watering is finished in the morning, the grain that is needed from the wagon house is brought down and mixed with oil-meal, etc., in the alley heretofore mentioned in the granary in the barn, for the next two feedings.

The next building I shall mention, which I will call shed No. 1, is twenty-one by twenty-four feet, sixteen foot posts—on the south side of the barn. The upper part of this building is filled in summer with market hay, which is pressed out and sold in the fall, the floor covered with sawdust and leaves, and when the time arrives, forty sheep are put up and kept there

until they are sold in the spring. Of all my feeding yards and stables, I always find that these second-story sheep do the best. The lower part of this building has manure piled under it in summer, as I always like to have what manure is not used in the spring under cover through the hot weather; it is taken out clean in the fall, and the shed arranged the same as the upper part, and, together with an open yard about twenty-four by sixty feet, holds sixty sheep. These sheep always have the run of this yard with the shed, except when it is stormy, and then they are closely confined to the shed.

The next in order is a small shed in rear of No. 1, about ten by twenty feet, in which stock rams are kept. The next is another low shed west of barn, about fourteen by twenty-four feet, for breeding ewes. Both these sheds have small yards attached for good weather, are used in summer for piling manure under, are cleaned out in the fall, and receive, like No. 1, a coating of sawdust and leaves, when they are ready again for the sheep.

Next comes another shed, also west of the barn, thirty by seventy-two feet, with twenty foo posts. The upper part of this building is also

filled with market hay in summer, pressed out and sold in the fall, and the floor then covered with sawdust and leaves, the same as No. 1 and the others.

Although I say that I put in sawdust and leaves in the fall, I will correct that a little by saying that sometimes, as I have done this year, and as I always advise when practicable, I put in the sawdust before harvest on these upper floors. It then has time to get nice and dry, thereby not only preserving the floor better, but also absorbing the more liquid manure from the animals. The lower part of this building is also used for piling manure under in summer, and in the fall is treated the same as the other. Before the sheep are brought into this building in the fall, we put up, made expressly for the purpose, and put away in summer, three partitions on the upper floor and three partitions below. This gives us four pens above and four below, each eighteen by thirty feet. Each of these pens holds forty-five sheep, which makes one hundred and eighty for the upper floor, and one hundred and eighty below, or altogether for this building, three hundred and sixty sheep. On account of the lower part of this building being lower than

the upper one, I have for each of these lower pens a small yard attached, about ten by eighteen feet, which in good weather they always get with their pens. Ventilating windows are also provided for all the pens, and are always regulated according to the weather. Two of these lower pens have two cisterns, supplied from the roof of this shed and one side of the barn, which generally, but not always, keep the sheep in this building supplied with water.

The next building is a shed, a "lean-to," on the north side of the barn, twenty by forty-four feet, used as the others for piling manure under in summer, cleaned out and treated same as the others in the fall, and holding seventy sheep. The upper part is used for straw, corn-stalks, etc., in winter. Under this shed I have a well, which besides its natural supply, gets what water this roof brings, together with the other side of the barn and another shed not yet mentioned. This shed has no yard.

The next and last permanent shed (although I had another temporary one I used last winter), is thirty-five by thirty-six feet, eighteen foot posts. The upper part of this shed is filled in summer with feeding hay for the sheep, to be fed out in

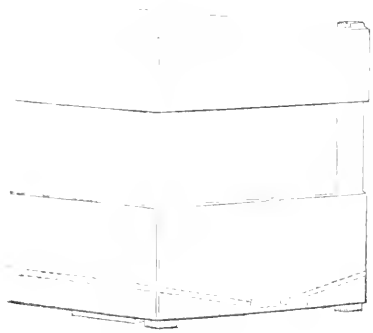
winter; twenty-one by thirty-six feet of this shed has also manure piled under in summer, used as the others in the fall, and together with an open yard about thirty-six by forty feet, holds seventy-five sheep. These seventy-five sheep, together with the yard containing sixty sheep, get their water from a well standing between the two yards. Of this shed, fourteen by thirty-six feet is floored and partitioned: one half of it is used for a horse stable when needed, and into the other half I always put twenty of my best sheep.

I have now given as well as I can, a description of the buildings and arrangements I use and although many of you may have better ones, still I must say I am very well satisfied with mine. I will now say something of feeding apparatus, and may premise that all claimed improvements in sheep feeding arrangements that have come under my observation for the last ten or twelve years, I have always examined very carefully, but have universally found after looking them over, that for fattening sheep, all things considered, they were no better than mine. For breeding sheep, however, I think there are better ones. I have a feeding box (after which I made others) sent me by my friend, WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN,

Esq., the noted fine-wool sheep breeder, which for breeding sheep is all that could be desired, as we can afford to take a little more time, and have a little waste and trouble with a few nice breeders. When, however, we come to fattening five, six or eight hundred sheep, it makes quite a difference whether one man can take care of them, or whether we must have two; as an extra hand through the feeding season will cost. wages and board, with us, at least one hundred and fifty dollars. Then, also, it makes quite a difference whether five hundred sheep waste a pint of grain per day, which I am satisfied was more than my whole flock wasted last winter, or whether they waste half a bushel per day; and I have seen more than that wasted by bad fixtures and management, thereby causing loss and discouragement to the person engaged in feeding. Also, whether we waste one hundred pounds of hay per day, or whether four or five hundred pounds will cover the waste for all winter. These wastings are what hurts, and although it looks like but a little, when you come to figure it up, you will be surprised to see what it amounts to.

My apparatus or feeding box for feeding hay, grain, roots, etc., which it took me four years to

perfect, and which you are all at liberty to use if you like it, is from twelve to fourteen feet long, twenty-two inches wide, with a tight bottom; the upper sides let in by the scantling at the ends and middle, and all the box, except the bottom, put together with good stout screws. (See annexed figure and description, originally published in the *Country Gentleman*.) I claim for this box economy, expedition and cleanliness.



Description of the Feeding Box.—Feeding Box 12 or 14 ft. long, and 22 inches wide—the bottom slanting from both sides and resting on a board in the middle, forming a complete trough for grain or roots. The bottom side boards should be 11 or 12 inches wide; then a space left of 8 or 10 inches according to size of sheep; then the top boards, 8 inches wide; the ends and sides to match. Corner pieces of scantling in the inside, of hemlock or oak, as pine will not hold a nail or screw, the latter of which is preferable in putting them together.

The sheep cannot upset the feeder nor his basket, as he carries it on his shoulder or in his arms to the first box; he walks up perfectly straight, and scatters the feed from the basket evenly and quickly through all the boxes in the yard, the sheep falling in behind him, just as well drilled soldiers fall in line at the tap of the drum—the whole time consumed for putting grain in four of

these boxes for seventy-five sheep, not being more than one minute. Then also the space being but from eight to ten inches wide, there is no chance for the sheep to get more than their heads through, and the box being but twenty-two inches wide, there is no need for crowding or straining to reach their feed, but each animal stands quietly and comfortably until his meal is finished. Also, every experienced sheep man knows that sheep always crowd up to their feed instead of away from it; consequently with a good feeding box no hay or grain can be wasted.

As I said before, four of these boxes can have grain put in, in one minute. Hay, straw, roots, etc, can also be put in very quickly, as the boys often take hay enough at once for two boxes, drop part in one, and the balance in the other, when by a little shake with the fork, it is scattered evenly through the box. The same also with roots, as the feeder, when he gets to the first box, can put them in so quick, that, let the sheep come as fast as they can, they cannot catch him before he is through.

These boxes have only to be turned over and back again, and they are clean. No dirt can get in from the sides, as the space between the upper

and lower board is too narrow, and the box being from twenty-eight to thirty inches high, no dirt can get in from the top, consequently when the box is turned over and back again, it is always clean.

As to feed, water, litter, salt, etc., I must first and most particularly urge the feeder to be sure and have plenty of them, of a good quality, and to have it *right there*. It is not very good economy to depend upon your neighbors, when you buy your feed or any part of it, to bring it to you from day to day, but you should always have at least two weeks or more feed on hand, when you will be all right, come fair weather or foul. I have seen a case of that kind, where a lot of fat sheep were obliged to go without their grain for a whole day, on account of a disappointment, which could not be made good again in three days' feeding. Water, too, should be looked after regularly. I have a rule that the boys shall go around and fill up the troughs with water twice in the morning after feeding, and twice in the afternoon, always commencing everything in the shape of feed, water, salt, etc. with No. 1, and always ending with the last yard or stable.

Littering cannot under any circumstances be neglected. I have often stood in the yard or

stable, and noticed when the bedding was becoming wet or dirty, how careful the sheep were to keep out of it, and how reluctantly they would lie down. As soon as they got a nice clean bedding, they would drop down upon it, and lie there as contented and happy, to all appearances, as an exhausted and worn-out person would on a bed of down; and here I shall take the liberty to say, that in my humble opinion, this is the time and the only time they accumulate flesh. Salt, ashes, etc., should also never be forgotten; no, not for a single day.

Quietness, also, is of the greatest importance, and, in order to secure it, I have a rule never to allow strangers in the yard, unless accompanied by the feeder. The sight of a stranger in the yard will send the sheep pell-mell in every direction, and the effect will be perceived for a whole day afterward; and no other reason can I assign for the forty sheep in the upper part of shed No. 1, doing better than the rest, but that we never go there except to feed, water, litter, etc., and there is no passing or re-passing through them as through the other pens.

The question is frequently asked, "what kind of grain is best for fattening sheep?" I answer,

for me, corn is the best for the main feed, although I like a few oats mixed to start with, and have no objections to beans, peas and oil-meal if they do not cost too much. Whenever they cost as much, or more than corn, I dispense with them, as a sheep feeder must count his cost as well as his reputation, if he intends to succeed. Another question arises: "Do you find whole or ground feed best?" For horses, cattle and pigs I prefer ground feed, but for sheep, especially fattening sheep, I choose whole or unground feed. I find that the sheep will grind it just as well as the mill to which we must give every tenth bushel, besides having the trouble of hauling the grain to and from it. I also find that fat sheep will hold up to their full feed much better, especially in soft weather, on whole than on ground feed; consequently drawing grain to and from the mill, and paying toll, is, in my estimation, labor and money lost.

A person to succeed in sheep feeding, must do it because he likes to do it—because he prefers to feed sheep and see them eat, to any other business done in winter; and although he may not be able or willing to do the work himself, still he must take delight in seeing it well attended to, if

he expects to prosper. He should be sure to see every sheep he has, at least once a day, when, if he understands his business, he can tell at a glance whether they have been properly cared for.

It is asked, "What kind of hay is best for sheep?" Emphatically I say clover, but it should be cut early, and cured nice and green. Timothy is probably best for horses, but for cattle and sheep I prefer clover, and would rather have a ton of nice green fine clover than a ton of timothy, although in market one ton of timothy will bring as much as two of clover. I have sometimes fed some timothy hay to my sheep, but always found that it was not the kind for them; they would grow lank and thin upon it—not a very good sign that a fattening animal is thriving well. As soon as they got the clover again they would plump up and look full and nice, and I can assure you unless your sheep look full and plump, they are not fattening very fast.

Is straw good for feeding sheep? One feed at noon of nice bright oat, barley or pea straw, I prefer to hay, as they not only relish it, but it is a change for them. Sheep are very fond of variety, and will eat daisies, weeds, thistles or

almost anything of the kind that is cut and cured green. Nice green corn-stalks are not very bad for sheep, and when I have plenty of them I always feed the sheep with them, at least once a day, and consider them as good as hay. I prefer, however, feeding them the fore part of the winter, as towards spring they will sometimes contract dampness, and then the sheep do not eat them so well.

I am asked to answer this question: "Shall we cultivate roots for fattening sheep, and what is their value compared with grain?" I have often thought I would experiment a little on this subject, but as the trial is attended with considerable pains and trouble to have it accurate, without which it is of no use, I have put it off from winter to winter, and now have no figures to give. I intend yet to test this question thoroughly. However, I will answer as well as I can, and as I have used more or less roots every year since I commenced feeding sheep, I think that I have a pretty good idea about them. I will say then, cultivate roots by all means, if you have plenty of manure and intend to put your land in proper condition; if not, you may better leave it alone, as you will surely get more grass and weeds than

roots. I was successful in raising about eighteen hundred bushels of flat turnips last season on about two and a half acres of land, and with very little labor. Early in the spring we covered the ground with about fifty loads of manure from one of the sheep sheds, and plowed it in about seven inches deep. Just before the time arrived to put in ruta baga seed, the ground was harrowed, another light dressing of fine manure put on and worked in with a gang plow about three inches deep. It was then well harrowed, and the seed immediately sown. The seed proving bad I gang-plowed the land again and sowed new seed. This time the seed came beautifully, but was soon destroyed by the turnip fly, when as a last resort, I gang-plowed it again, sowed the common purple-top turnip, and had the result stated. On account of the frequent gang-plowing by which the weeds were destroyed, we had no trouble but to thin out the plants. Part of the seed was put in with a large seed planter, and part sowed broadcast, and in thinning the plants where the seed was put in with the planter, the work could be done in one-half the time that was required where the seed was sown broadcast.

With regard to the value of roots for feeding, my experience is that whenever they are worth at home more than seventy-five cents per barrel, and corn not over from one dollar to one dollar and twenty-five cents per bushel, the corn is the cheapest, and I would use only a few roots as a substitute for green food. I consider carrots and ruta bagas better than common turnips; still by feeding a little more of the latter than the former, I think the sheep do just as well on them.

Another inquiry is, "How often do you clean out your yards and stables in winter?" Not at all, unless I perceive danger to the buildings from the weight of the sheep and manure on these upper floors; then we remove a quantity sufficient to make the building safe, and leave all the rest until the sheep are sold, when we find the manure so hard and solid that it must often be cut with an axe or hay-knife into blocks before it can be handled—thus showing that no decomposition has taken place during the feeding season.

Feeding with me is always commenced about half-past five in the morning, when I always endeavor to be there, and see that everything is right, and give special orders, if necessary, for the day. The best help will sometimes put off for

to-morrow what should be done to-day, and this is worse in stock feeding than in any other business.

I hold that the noses of the sheep should be smeared with tar, at least four times through the feeding season; first, when they are brought home in the fall; second, when they go into their winter quarters, and then twice during the winter. By doing this, we prevent all trouble with colds and foul noses. The old method of catching and holding the sheep to perform this operation made it a laborious task, and I now practice a new and easier way of doing it. We simply take two or three of the sheep-boxes which I have already described, which are loose and can be set anywhere, and make a small yard under the shed, and drive the sheep in, and pack them closely; one man holds the bucket of tar, and two or three, each with a wooden tar ladle, jump right in among the sheep, and without catching or holding the sheep, put the tar on, commencing at one end and coming out at the other; and this job, for six or eight hundred sheep that used the old way to take us almost all day, can now be done in less than two hours, besides being so much less injurious to the sheep.

When I went into the sheep-feeding business years ago, it was more with a view to the consequent improvement of the land (it would hardly grow a crop of good beans then), than to make the ready dollar. In this I have fully succeeded. I wanted to make two spears of grass grow where but one grew before, and I am sure I am getting three, some of my neighbors say four; however, I call it three. The meadows that used to cut from one-half to one ton of hay per acre, now yield on an average over two. Raising rye was then out of the question; last year I got from about sixteen acres, four hundred bushels of rye, and straw enough to have amounted to near nine hundred dollars, if I had sold it (which I never do, unless I replace it by hay for bedding, as I have done this year, getting three tons of hay for one ton of straw). This year I got from forty-five bushels sowing, fifty loads.

For fear of misleading you, I must say, that with all the experience and precaution in buying, good fixtures, plenty of feed, litter, care, etc., you will not always succeed. For though I have for the last twelve years studied the thing closely, and carried it out carefully, in spite of all my efforts I have not always made money, and would

almost guarantee that out of every ten new sheep feeders, eight will probably feed but one year. When a friend asks my advice on the subject, I always say to him, try twenty-five or fifty, and then if you like it, get more the next year. Some have looked upon this advice as selfish, and given to keep others out, and have rushed into the business, and not only the first year made no money, but actually lost nearly half their investment. We used to have several sheep feeders in this and adjoining counties, and as the principal feeders have all left the business except myself, I think this is pretty conclusive evidence that what I now say is about right.

In regard to the profit of the different breeds of sheep for fattening, allow me to say, that in my twelve years' experience in feeding, I have found the breed of sheep to have much to do with their early maturity, weight and fattening qualities. I have had Leicesters and their grades, Cotswold grades, South Down grades, Merinos and their grades, and have always found that whenever the Leicester blood predominated, I had an animal that would fatten quick at an early age, and make good weight, and have had no trouble when the animal has been half or more

of Leicester blood, with good keeping, to make him dress one hundred pounds of mutton at twenty months old.

I have lately been informed by a Western New York gentleman, that I am represented among fine wooled sheep men as having changed my views on the question of feeding coarse or fine wooled sheep, and that I am now in favor of fine wools. I think my experiment of last winter on this point, printed in the *Country Gentleman* of April 30th, 1868, would satisfy any one to the contrary. Nevertheless, having found it impossible to get coarse-wooled wethers enough for feeding the present winter, I am again fattening a number of fine wools—but not from choice. Among the latter is one with a ring in his horn, which as I was told by the man from whom I got him, was once sold for three hundred dollars. I was glad to get rid of him, although he was fat, for five dollars and fifty cents; and, as to fine-wools generally, I am fully convinced they will not make me more than half the money for winter feeding that the coarse wools will.

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